PRESS RELEASE

COMMUNITY MULTIMEDIA CENTER OPENS IN MAZAR-I SHARIF

MAZAR-I SHARIF, AFGHANISTAN — A new community multimedia center opened today in Mazar-i Sharif, which will increase access to the internet and other digital media technology for community groups, civil-society organizations, small businesses, and private citizens. The USAID-funded center is the second in a network of such centers across Afghanistan.

Equipped with ten computers and simple video and audio equipment, the Anaar (pomegranate) Multimedia Center will provide internet access, professional assistance, and short training courses for those who want to improve their media, public affairs, and networking skills.

"This multimedia center opens up a new world for the people in Mazar-i Sharif. It is important that the citizens are well informed on using digital media tools to strengthen their outreach potential and make their voices heard," said David Thompson, the Office Director of the USAID Office of Democracy and Govermance . "Media can be used to bring the public and the government closer together."

The training courses offered by the center will enable visitors to make the fullest possible use of the internet and digital media. These will range from very basic courses (Computers for Beginners, How to e-mail, How to Blog) to more advanced ones (Creating Your Own Website, Filming a Short Video, Editing a Short Video). The courses offered will also focus on the information potential of the internet, for example: Using the Internet to Find a University Course, and Using the Computer to Learn English.

Frozan, a teacher from a local high school who has been learning to use the computer, said she was very happy coming to the center. "We didn't have access to computers in the past. I teach English, but I couldn't use a computer. This center is a good place for women and girls to learn comfortably. We're being trained by a female trainer so we're satisfied."

USAID is establishing these multimedia centers as part of its Afghanistan Media Development and Empowerment Project, which is implemented by Internews, an international media development organization, to strengthen the media sector in Afghanistan. In the coming weeks, additional centers will open in Jalalabad and Kandahar.

A regional social organization based in Mazar, the Assistance to Defend Women Rights Organization, will manage the new multimedia center there.

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